

Position Information – Legal Assistant (Case Technician OA), GS-0986-4/5/6

This position is located in the Hearing Offices of the Office of Disability and Adjudication Review (ODAR), Social Security Administration (SSA). At the full performance level, the incumbent would be expected to provide a full range of clerical and technical support for Administrative Law Judges (ALJs) and other technical/professional positions in the Hearing Office in processing cases filed under Titles II, XVI and XVIII of the Social Security Act. ***If hired below the full performance level, the incumbent will perform in a trainee capacity, with assignments leading to being able to perform the full range of duties described below.***

Duties:

- Reviews and analyzes a wide variety of medical and legal documentation, records and evidence to ensure that ODAR case files are received and developed in accordance with legal and regulatory authorities. Performs a wide range of actions in support of pre- and post-hearing case development, including composing correspondence to request medical reports from physicians, hospitals, claimants' representatives, etc., and to prepare responses to written inquiries on cases. Requests consultative examinations and medical records through the Disability Determination Services (DDS), and maintains a follow-up system to ensure receipt of such records.
- Ensures that aged cases, terminally ill (TERI) cases and dire need cases are given priority and all steps of the process are handled in an expeditious manner.
- Schedules cases for hearing in accordance with legal and regulatory requirements and coordinates time and date of hearing with claimants, representatives, expert witnesses, and hearing reporters. This includes arranging for space, scheduling all participants, making necessary travel arrangements when the hearing is held at a remote site, preparing itineraries, and preparing travel vouchers. Prepares Notices of Hearing, and contractor invoices for payment of vocational experts and medical experts.
- Upon receipt of additional evidence received after the hearing, reopens the record to admit the exhibits or closes the record if no additional evidence is received.
- Examines fee agreements received from representatives for proper criteria before presentation to the ALJ for signature. Uses information at Section I-5-109 of HALLEX to ensure correct processing. Ensures that the agreement meets all conditions for approval relating to fee setting, authenticity of attorney on the case, and legal guardian status.
- Maintains, reviews, updates and utilizes a variety of data systems (NS Elite, HOTS, etc.) to ensure timely scheduling of hearings, proper case flow, equitable distribution of workload and proper payment of services, travel, supplies and equipment.
- Responds to a wide range of inquiries from public, legal and judicial officials, and Federal, State and local officials relating to the legal processing of the hearings and appeals program. Provides information regarding the basic legal process and documentary evidence required of the claimants, legal representatives, medical and vocational experts, and other Federal and State personnel. In this connection, Incumbent must use discretion in dispensing information and must at all times use tact and diplomacy in handling personal and telephone contacts. When furnishing information, documents the file accordingly.
- Assists claimants and other visitors by responding to a variety of questions, often providing the claimants with information about their right to be represented, advising them when additional evidence is necessary, and providing other background information as requested.
- As required, monitors hearings. When participating in hearings, incumbent is recognized as the Agency's representative in defining the legal process and decorum to the claimant and legal representative and other participants in the hearing. Sets up hearing room and recording equipment, ensuring that the equipment functions properly throughout the hearing. Prepares non-standard opening statement for the ALJ to use to begin the hearing. Assures that all evidence and testimony presented at the hearing is complete and recorded. Observes and makes notes of relevant hearing room conditions, and records specific and relevant testimony of the claimant and/or witnesses.
- Performs master docket functions. This involves receiving and reviewing incoming material, inputting appropriate information into the computer, requesting claim files, reviewing files to determine timeliness of case filing, transferring cases and giving status by telephone or letter to claimants and their representatives.

- Uses personal computer for word processing functions, data input, queries, reports and case tracking systems. Maintains a library of permanent templates/diskettes of frequently used materials in ALJ decisions; e.g., SSA law and regulations paragraphs, findings of fact, and various generic decisional paragraphs. Uses the templates appropriately when typing documents.
- Prepares draft material (decisions, dismissals, and other correspondence) from tape recordings or handwritten material; and prepares in final format after review. This material involves the use highly specialized medical and legal terminology, necessitating reference to technical dictionaries or manuals. Determine the propriety of form and arrangement requiring selection from a variety of formats. Proofreads typed materials for grammar, spelling, formats, typographical errors, conformance to procedural requirements, and assembles finished product. Also types exhibit lists and fee authorization forms, as requested. A qualified typist is required.
- Prepares letters, memoranda, forms, reports and other materials. Incumbent is responsible for spelling, punctuation, grammar, and arrangement of final copy.
- As requested, may assist the Hearing Office Systems Administrator or management in training support staff in the use of computers, as well as various software applications which are used in decision processing (i.e., Microsoft Word), by demonstrating how the computer and software are used in performing their job. Notifies the appropriate personnel when equipment repairs are required.
- Based on the type of case, prepares cases and decisions for mailing by ensuring copies of the decision are sent to the appropriate parties and effectuating component. When mailing fee agreements, ensures ALJ approval and signature before release. Processes and mails other correspondence as necessary.
- As requested, photocopies portions of claims files to be presented to claimant/representative and medical/vocational expert before hearings are held.
- As requested, performs receptionist duties; e.g., signing in claimants and hearing participants as they arrive for the hearing, answering questions at receptionist window; answering primary telephone line and responding to questions from the public; referring other calls to staff.
- Performs other duties as assigned.

Complexity:

The work consists of duties which involve a wide variety of processes and activities depending upon the type of case being worked. The incumbent analyzes each case to discern phase or issue involved in order to determine correct course of action. The incumbent selects alternatives as appropriate. The work involves elements which need identification since meticulous attention to detail is required. The incumbent must have the ability to adjust priorities and recognize situations that require considerable judgment and tact. The incumbent is regarded as an expert source of information on regulatory requirements and is frequently called upon to provide accurate information rapidly on short notice.

Responsibility:

The purpose of the work is to create, process and maintain various documents for the hearing office. Work comprises part of the case processing and affects the timeliness, accuracy and acceptability of the Agency's work products. Work of the incumbent impacts on the due process rights of the claimant and directly affects the ability of claimants to receive benefits under the Social Security Act.

Personal Contacts:

Contacts are with employees at all levels within and outside ODAR, e.g., SSA district/branch offices, ODAR/SSA Headquarters, and also claimants, attorneys/lay representatives, Congressional representatives, physicians, vocational experts, medical experts, and representatives from ODAR Regional and Headquarters offices. Contacts are for the purpose of explaining procedures or furnishing information. In dealing with claimants and their representatives, tact and discretion are required. Information provided to inquirer must be accurate, and incumbent is expected to determine inquirer's right to information.

Physical Demands & Work Environment:

The work is primarily performed while sitting. There may be some walking, standing, bending and carrying of items such as files, records and books. Some movement may be needed to obtain records from files in the office, to visit other offices in the building, or to visit other locations. Work is performed in an office setting involving everyday risks or discomforts that require normal safety precautions typical of such places as offices, meeting and hearing rooms.